

Physics Department

Junior Faculty Mentoring Plan

Rev 6/15/15

Introduction

Junior faculty are hired in the Physics Department with the expectation that these excellent young scholars will become excellent teachers in the department and will achieve the stature in their field of research expected of a tenured faculty member¹. The department is committed to mentoring its junior faculty so that they can achieve their full potential in these areas.

The path to tenure incorporates a number of formal reviews that junior faculty undergo:

- 1st year confirming review;
- 3rd year developmental review;
- 5th year critical review

The nature of these reviews is well documented in <http://fas.columbia.edu/chair-resources/promotion-and-tenure> .

However, the mentoring of junior faculty consists of more than just advising the junior faculty of the outcomes of these reviews. That is the formal process, but there needs to be a continuous mentoring process throughout their career up to tenure

. In the following we describe the process beyond the above formal reviews.

Role of the Chair

The role of the chair is to go beyond the above reviews, and to use those reviews as a means to facilitate a discussion with the junior faculty member. The following are the mentoring responsibilities of the chair.

Meet with the Junior Faculty Member Shortly after Appointment

The chair will meet with newly appointed junior faculty members soon after they start their appointment (in mid-September for those appointed in July, or late January for those appointed in January). The purpose of that meeting is to:

- Welcome them to the department and talk about resources they have access to

¹ The Provost's guidelines (Principles and Customs Governing University wide Tenure reviews) state that: "An appointment to tenure is made in the University only when an individual of widely recognized excellence is found to fill a scholarly need that is demonstrably vital to a discipline central to the University's purposes. The process of tenure review, therefore, is concerned with both the qualities of the nominee and the potential impact of the proposed appointment on the nominating department or school."

- Let them know the chair is there to help them along their career path and to help facilitate their research and teaching in any way possible
- Explain in general terms the timeline and review structure on the path to tenure
- Introduce their mentoring committee to them

A lot of anxiety for junior faculty arises from not knowing what to expect and what is expected of them. This initial meeting will help reduce those anxieties that arise from lack of knowledge and will put a “face” (the chair) on the process – someone they can come to about information on the process.

Meet regularly with the Junior Faculty Member

The chair will meet at least once a year with the junior faculty member to discuss progress, plans and areas of concern on the part of the junior faculty member. In the years where reviews are held, that meeting will be based on the outcome of the reviews and the letter sent to the junior faculty member. The chair is of course available at any time to talk with the junior faculty on an ad-hoc basis.

Appointing a Mentoring Committee

In order to formalize mentoring, the Chair will appoint a committee to interact with the junior faculty member. The composition of the committee will be such as to include faculty that can advise a junior faculty member on the tenure process. The committee will have both an informal and a formal aspect. Informal in that they are there to help the junior faculty member succeed and have his/her best interest at heart, yet formal in that the junior faculty member knows that they have been formally appointed to help, so he/she doesn't feel awkward when taking their time. As a new structure, we expect this to evolve as we gain more experience with such committees. As currently envisioned the composition of the committee would include:

- **A senior faculty member in a research area close to the junior faculty member.** This member will serve as chair of the mentoring committee. His/her principal role would be to advise the junior faculty member on matters dealing with research. Such areas as: are they getting research grants? If not, advise on best strategies to obtain grants. Point out both internal and external funding opportunities. Advocate for resources and/or teaching relief on behalf of the junior faculty member if appropriate. Provide help or advice on how to secure talks and colloquia on behalf of the junior faculty member to increase their visibility in the community.
- **Senior Lecturer in Discipline, Jeremy Dodd.** He will provide the junior faculty member with guidance on teaching activities, offering advice on how to improve teaching and potentially matching the junior faculty member to the most appropriate courses for them to teach. He is a valuable resource for them to discuss any teaching concerns they may have.
- **A recently tenured faculty member.** This may be in the junior faculty member's area of research or not. This member would be able to talk informally with the junior member about the tenure process from the point of view of someone who has recently gone through the process.

Role of the Mentoring Committee

Once appointed, the mentoring committee will follow the junior faculty member through their career up to tenure – if possible. Circumstances may change, so the chair may change the composition of the committee if needed. The responsibilities of the committee are to:

- Meet informally with the junior faculty member once per semester

- Meet with the chair once per year to discuss the progress of the junior faculty member
- Meet on an ad-hoc basis at the request of the junior faculty member

The mentoring committee will serve as a valuable resource for the 3rd and 5th year committees, providing input that may not be readily available from the CV, statements and discussions with outside physicists.